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Impact of Digitalization on Learning and Entertainment Among Students of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar & Alipurduar

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Abstract:

Digitalization has transformed the landscape of education and entertainment, particularly among students. With the advent of smartphones, social media, e-learning platforms, and streaming services, digital media has become a central component of students' daily lives. While it facilitates access to vast educational resources and personalized learning opportunities, it also brings concerns about distraction, misinformation, and digital addiction. This journal explores the dual impact of digitalization on student learning and entertainment habits, analyzing usage trends, educational outcomes, and the role of digital literacy in North Bengal's student population.

Keywords: *Digitalization, Education, Smartphones, Social Media, Digital Media.*

Introduction:

The ways in which students engage with educational and recreational content have undergone a dramatic transformation in recent decades. Historically, learning was primarily facilitated through traditional media such as printed textbooks, radio broadcasts, classroom lectures, and educational television programs. These tools formed the backbone of knowledge dissemination for generations, offering structured, linear, and largely passive forms of engagement. In both rural and urban settings, students relied on these media to access curated information, gain literacy, and participate in cultural and civic education. Radio and television programs developed by public broadcasters often served to bridge educational gaps, particularly in underserved areas with limited access to qualified teachers and resources. Entertainment too was shaped by traditional media. Children and adolescents found leisure in storytelling through books, radio dramas, television cartoons, and scheduled weekly programming. Such content, while limited in quantity, often played a dual role—educating through moral narratives and instilling cultural values.

The emergence of the digital age has redefined this landscape. The proliferation of smartphones, computers, and internet connectivity has ushered in a new era in which the boundaries between education and entertainment are increasingly blurred. Today's students, whether in rural villages or urban centers, navigate a complex digital ecosystem that includes online classes, educational apps, YouTube tutorials, e-books,

social media, mobile games, and over-the-top (OTT) platforms. These digital tools have democratized access to information, personalized the learning experience, and created opportunities for interactive and self-directed education. This shift was drastically accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted conventional classroom-based education worldwide. With physical schools closed for prolonged periods, educational institutions were compelled to adopt digital platforms almost overnight. Online classes, video conferencing tools, digital assignments, and virtual learning environments became the new norm, reshaping the educational infrastructure across all levels of learning. For many students, this shift represented their first full immersion into digital education, often accompanied by challenges such as inadequate devices, unstable internet connectivity, and lack of digital literacy—particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. At the same time, the immersive nature of digital entertainment—driven by algorithmic suggestions, real-time engagement, and gamified interfaces—competes directly with students' academic focus. While digital media provides unprecedented flexibility and autonomy in learning, it also raises concerns regarding screen addiction, reduced attention spans, and the dilution of academic discipline. The convergence of learning and entertainment on shared digital platforms has made it more difficult to distinguish between productive engagement and passive consumption.

This research journal seeks to explore the impact of digitalization on student behaviour with respect to both learning and entertainment. In this study, we focus specifically on students from rural areas of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, and Alipurduar—districts in North Bengal where digital access and adoption vary widely. By examining patterns of digital media use among students—particularly in the context of the post-pandemic shift to online education—this study aims to assess how digital tools are reshaping educational experiences and leisure activities. It also considers the role of digital literacy, content quality, and socio-economic factors in mediating these effects, offering insights into how digital media can be better integrated into the student experience for balanced development.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to analyse the demographic profile of students aged 15 to 26 years from the rural districts of Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, and Cooch Behar who participated in the survey, considering factors such as age, gender, and educational level. It seeks to assess the prevalence and patterns of smartphone usage across different educational stages, from Class 10 to post-graduate levels. A primary focus is to identify the main purposes for which students use smartphones, including entertainment, education, and access to health-related information. The study also evaluates the extent of digital media usage for educational purposes, highlighting the most commonly used platforms and applications for learning. Additionally, it investigates how students utilize smartphones to access health information and their level of awareness regarding digital health resources. Finally, the research aims to highlight the existing imbalance between recreational and educational use of smartphones among rural students and to identify the barriers that limit the effective use of digital technology for academic purposes.

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of how digitalization influences students' learning and entertainment habits. The quantitative component provides measurable data on usage patterns and demographic variables, while the qualitative aspect captures deeper insights into student perceptions and experiences.

Study Area

The research was conducted in the rural areas of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, and Alipurduar in North Bengal. These areas were selected due to their varying levels of digital access and educational infrastructure, offering

a representative sample of rural student populations affected by digital transition.

Population and Sample

A survey conducted across the rural districts of Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, and Cooch Behar—each comprising 400 respondents—revealed a relatively balanced gender distribution, with a slight male majority in all three regions. The majority of respondents across the districts were aged between 10 and 24 years, reflecting a predominantly youth-oriented population. Smaller portions of respondents fell within the 25 to 39 and 40 to 54 age groups, while the 55 to 70 age group represented the smallest demographic. These findings underscore the study's focus on a digitally active, youth-dominated population in North Bengal's rural context.

Data Collection Methods

- Structured Questionnaire: A survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire comprising both closed and open-ended questions. It covered areas such as device ownership, time spent on digital media, types of content consumed, purposes of usage (learning vs. entertainment), and self-reported academic performance.

- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Conducted in each district with 8–10 students per group to gain qualitative insights into digital behaviour, challenges in accessing online resources, and their perspectives on balancing educational and entertainment use.

Findings And Observation

The students who participated in the survey were aged between 15 and 26 years and were enrolled in upper educational levels, ranging from Class 10 to post-graduate studies. This age group is known for its frequent use of smartphones, which has become an integral part of both their learning and recreational activities. Their increased digital engagement has been further supported by the West Bengal government's "Taruner Swapna" Scheme, which provides a one-time financial grant of ₹10,000 to eligible students for purchasing smartphones, tablets, or personal computers. Initially launched for Class 12 students in government-run schools, the scheme was later extended to include Class 11 students, aiming to bridge the digital divide and enhance access to online educational resources across the state. The total number of surveyed students included 197 from Jalpaiguri, 170 from Alipurduar, and 213 from Cooch Behar. Among these students, approximately 75% in Jalpaiguri are enrolled in Classes 10 to 12, while the remaining 25% are pursuing higher education. In Alipurduar, 72% of students fall within the same lower secondary category, with 28% engaged in higher studies. In Cooch Behar, 69% of surveyed students are in Classes 10 to 12, and 31% are in higher education. In terms of gender distribution, Jalpaiguri has 46% male and 54% female students. Alipurduar's male student population is 60.5%, while females account for 39.5%. In Cooch Behar, 55% of the surveyed students are male, compared to 45% who are female.

No of students surveyed	Class 10-Class 12		College-University		Total no of students surveyed
Districts ↓	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Jalpaiguri	68	79	22	28	197
Alipurduar	72	51	31	16	170
Cooch Behar	78	71	40	24	213

All the respondents reported regular use of smartphones in their daily lives. When asked about their primary use of smartphones with internet connectivity—whether for entertainment, education, or accessing health-related information—entertainment emerged as the dominant purpose. Every participant indicated that they use smartphones for entertainment activities such as gaming or social media, while less than half stated they use them for educational purposes. Among those who do use digital platforms for learning, the main reason cited was the ease and convenience of searching for academic content. However, for the majority, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and popular games such as BGMI form the core of their smartphone engagement, highlighting a strong preference for recreational use over educational or informational content.

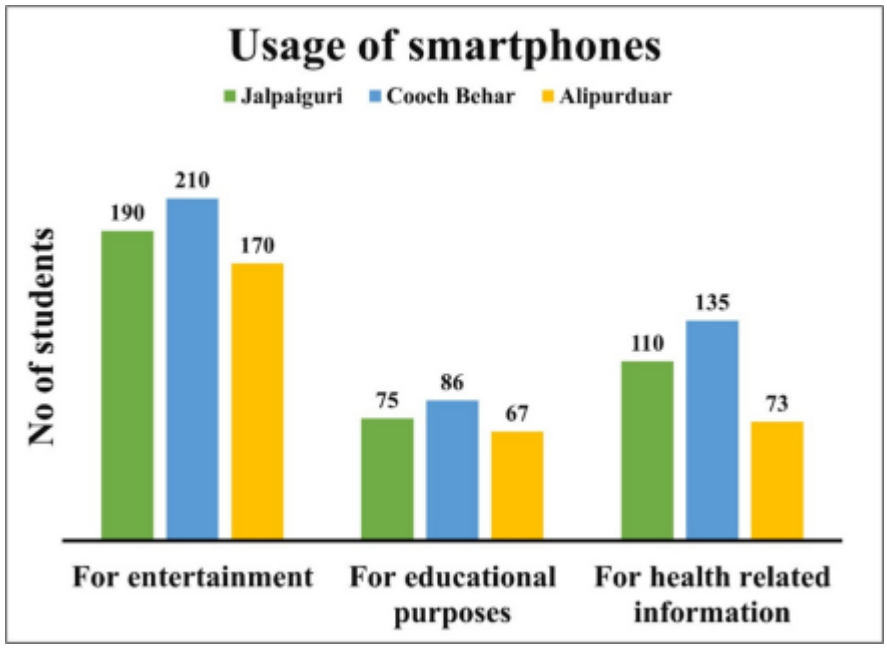

Figure 1: Number of students using smartphones for various purposes in each district.

The figure 1 (shown above) illustrating smartphone usage among students in the rural districts of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, and Alipurduar highlights notable trends in how these devices are utilized for entertainment, education, and health-related purposes. The data clearly shows that smartphones are most commonly used for entertainment, with Cooch Behar having the highest number of students (210) using them for this purpose, followed by Jalpaiguri (190) and Alipurduar (170). This widespread use of smartphones for recreational activities such as social media, video streaming, and gaming reflects the growing influence of digital entertainment in students' daily lives.

When it comes to educational purposes, usage drops significantly in comparison. Cooch Behar still leads with 86 students using smartphones for learning, while Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar follow with 75 and 67 students respectively. This suggests that although smartphones have the potential to be powerful educational tools, their utility in this area is not being fully realized, possibly due to a lack of awareness, motivation, or access to quality educational content.

In the case of health-related information, the trend again places Cooch Behar at the forefront, with 135 students using smartphones to access health content, followed by Jalpaiguri with 110 and Alipurduar with 73. This indicates a moderate but growing awareness of using digital media for personal health and hygiene education—an encouraging sign, especially in the context of rural health promotion and pandemic-era digital outreach.

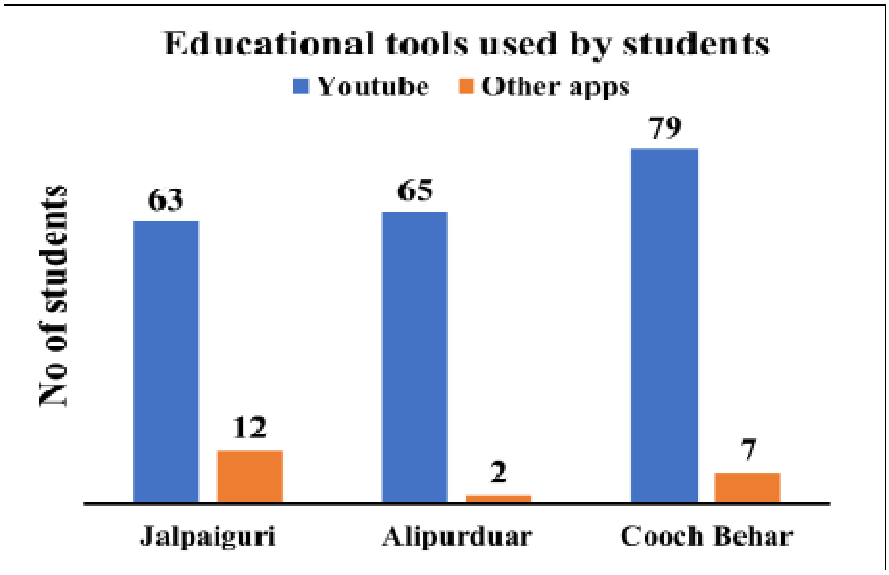

Figure 2: Number of students using digital media for educational purposes in each district.

Among the students who use digital media for educational purposes, 63 in Jalpaiguri reported using YouTube as their primary tool, while 12 students used other educational apps (as shown in figure 2). In Alipurduar, 65 students used YouTube for learning, and only 2 students relied on other apps. In Cooch Behar, 79 students used YouTube, whereas 7 students reported using other educational applications for their studies. When it comes to overall educational use of smartphones, the numbers drop significantly in comparison to entertainment. Cooch Behar still leads with 86 students using smartphones for learning, while Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar follow with 75 and 67 students respectively.

Out of the 580 students surveyed, the most frequently used digital platforms were Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, BGMI, and Snapchat (shown in figure 3). Facebook was the most popular, used by 563 students (97.07%), followed closely by Instagram with 558 students (96.21%). YouTube was also widely accessed, with 488 students (84.14%) reporting regular use, indicating its importance for both entertainment and educational purposes. BGMI, the popular mobile game, was used by 292 students (50.34%), showing the strong appeal of gaming among the student demographic. Snapchat was the least used among the listed platforms but still engaged 197 students (33.96%). These figures clearly demonstrate that social media and entertainment platforms dominate the digital habits of students, with Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube being the most widely accessed.

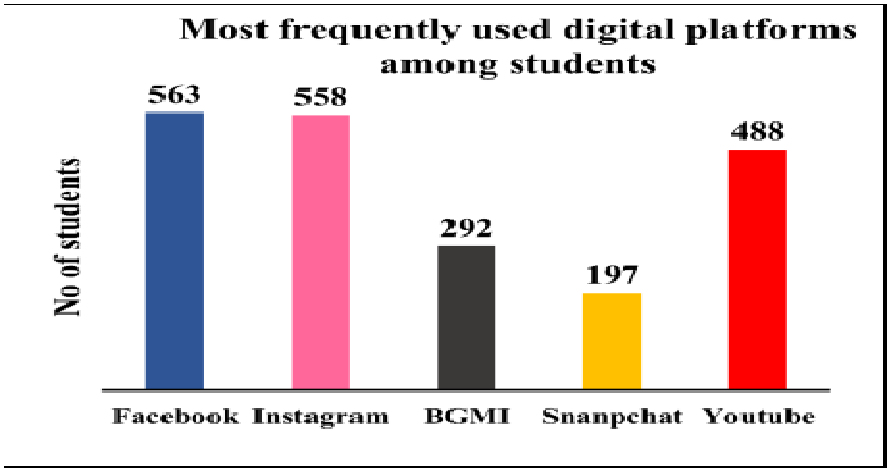

Figure 3: Most frequently used digital platforms among students.

Discussion & Conclusion:

The data suggests that while smartphones are widespread among students in these districts, entertainment remains the dominant use, with education and health lagging behind. The consistently higher figures from Cooch Behar across all categories may point to better digital penetration, awareness, or infrastructure, while the comparatively lower numbers from Alipurduar suggest a need for targeted interventions to improve access and digital literacy. This analysis underscores the importance of encouraging a more balanced use of smartphones among rural students, with a stronger emphasis on leveraging these devices for educational growth and health awareness.

The findings of this study clearly highlight the pervasive role of digital media in the lives of students in the rural districts of Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, and Cooch Behar. With widespread access to smartphones—partially driven by government initiatives like the Taruner Swapna Scheme—students are deeply engaged in digital environments. However, the data reveals that this engagement is heavily skewed toward entertainment and social media, with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and mobile games like BGMI occupying the majority of their digital time.

While a portion of students do use digital media for educational purposes, the numbers are significantly lower, suggesting that the full educational potential of these technologies remains underutilized. YouTube stands out as the most popular educational tool, whereas formal educational apps see minimal usage. The use of digital media for health-related information, though less frequent, indicates growing awareness and represents an opportunity for targeted digital health campaigns.

Many students do not use digital media much for learning because they may not know about the educational content available or may not feel motivated to use it. They might find it difficult to use educational apps or websites because they lack the necessary digital skills. Most students prefer spending time on social media, games, and entertainment rather than studying online. Sometimes, there are not enough good educational materials in their local language or suitable for their needs. Poor internet connection in rural areas also makes it hard to access online learning smoothly. Without help from teachers or family on how to use smartphones for education, students often don't explore these options. Some students have older or simple phones that do not support many learning apps well. Financial problems may prevent them from buying enough data or better devices. Lastly, some families or communities may still prefer traditional ways of learning and may not encourage using digital tools for education.

This imbalance between recreational and academic use underscores the need for structured interventions—such as digital literacy programs, integration of digital tools into the formal education system, and awareness campaigns—to help students make more purposeful use of technology. Strengthening the digital infrastructure, particularly in less engaged areas like Alipurduar, and promoting educational content in local languages could further enhance the educational impact of digitalization. Ultimately, bridging the gap between entertainment and education in digital media use will be key to leveraging technology for the holistic development of students in rural North Bengal.

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